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SUBJECT: UK HOME SECRETARY FINDS POSITIVE VIBES IN ANKARA

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11. (C) Summary. UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith's January 5-7 Ankara visit was a success, both British and Turkish contacts agreed. Discussions focused heavily on counterterrorism (CT) and laid the groundwork for high-level counterterrorism consultations set to be held in London in the coming weeks. The substance and tone of the Turkish approach was uncharacteristically positive. The UK agreed to support Turkey's candidacy to chair the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee in 2010. The two sides also discussed a range of possible "soft" CT programs focused on de-radicalization. The results of the upcoming high-level consultations will provide a fuller sense of where this CT relationship is heading. End summary.

12. (C) During her January 5-7 Ankara visit, UK Home Secretary Jacqui Smith met with Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek, Interior Minister Besir Atalay, Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin and Women's Minister Nimet Cubukcu. Discussions focused heavily on counterterrorism. According to MFA Security Affairs Department Head Metin Ergin, the meeting arose from commitments to initiate a formal CT dialogue made during the May 2008 visit to Turkey by Foreign Secretary Miliband. The Smith visit was meant in part to lay the groundwork for those discussions, which could take place as early as February in London, UK DCM Giles Portman told us January 16.

"Really Positive"

13. (C) Secretary Smith's discussions with the Turks were "really positive," Portman told us. The two sides were able to "talk more constructively about hard issues." Home Secretary Smith was equally pleased; she sent a personal seven-page note to the U.K. Prime Minister on her visit. The Turks uncharacteristically praised the UK for actions it has taken against the PKK in past months, Portman noted. Cicek, Atalay and Sahin all lauded the UK's proscription of the PKK as a terrorist organization and expressed appreciation for recent UK operations against the PKK fund raisers, which Secretary Smith had briefed in some detail. Echoing remarks made by DPM Cicek to Smith, the MFA's Ergin, in his January 9

meeting with us, also went out of his way to express Turkey's gratitude for UK efforts to persuade other EU countries take more forceful action against the PKK threat. (Note: Curiously, MFA D/US Tezcan, in a January 14 conversation with the Ambassador, described the Turks' exchange with Smith in sterner terms. End note.)

¶4. (C) DPM Cicek asked that both sides move quickly to implement the MOU on counterterrorism concluded during Miliband's May 2008 visit, according to Portman. The British expect a concrete action plan to result from the upcoming bilateral meeting. The UK hopes to develop with the Turks a list of options for closing the gap between their two approaches on the PKK. The British will press the Turks to strengthen CT legislation and to provide information in a more timely manner both on terrorism and organized crime. Currently, the Turks are very good about sharing information on the PKK and, to a lesser extent, on other terrorist groups. They are less forthcoming, however, about information on third countries, he confided. When Secretary Smith pressed Cicek to work to extend the current four-day limit for holding terrorist suspects, Cicek acknowledged that four days is not long enough and asked for more information on the British 28-day detention system. This, too, Portman remarked, was a change from previous Turkish insistence that the issue was simply "too difficult" to tackle.

Turkey's Requests

¶5. (C) During the Smith visit, Turkey sought British support for two CT-related initiatives, Porter related. Cicek asked the UK to support Turkey's candidacy to chair the UNSC's Counterterrorism Committee in 2010. Portman learned recently that London has agreed to this request. Turkey also asked Britain to help "spread the message" in northern Iraq that Turkish legislation ensures that PKK members who have not taken part in illegal activity would not be subject to prosecution if they came forward. Cicek estimated the legislation would cover 90 percent of Turkish PKK members. The British have not responded to this request, and are skeptical about Cicek's statistics, Portman stated.

¶6. (C) Justice Minister Sahin asked Secretary Smith for closer British cooperation on extradition. Meetings in 2005 and 2006 between Turkish and British prosecutors had been helpful, but problems remained in the extradition process. Sahin proposed new working group meetings, this time including other agencies. The British were receptive, Portman said, adding that EU CT Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove had discussed the same issue with the Turks in late December (Ref A), and that an extradition seminar is planned for the near future. Smith separately stressed the need to tackle organized crime and money laundering as an integral part of stemming terrorist financing.

"Soft" Initiatives

¶7. (C) In addition to the law enforcement-related issues, the Home Secretary also raised several "soft" initiatives, Portman explained. The UK hopes to pursue more counter-radicalization programs within Turkey. It also hopes to work with Turkey to reach out to the region and the broader Muslim world. As part of its plan, the UK is organizing a series of counter-radicalization events in conjunction with Bahcesehir University in Istanbul. It also hopes to build on the successful November 2008 visit to Turkey by prominent British Muslim leaders. In addition, it is considering possible mechanisms to support Turkey's project to "update" the Haddith for modern times by involving moderate Islamic scholars from Britain and other countries. Separately, the UK is exploring ways to involve Turkish women in efforts to prevent radicalization. Portman welcomed greater dialogue with the United States on ways to approach these difficult issues. In our separate conversation with the MFA's Metin Ergin, he noted that the UK is prioritizing de-radicalization and, as he described it, hoping to "benefit from Turkey's experience." Metin was skeptical, however, about the applicability of Turkey's experience to others.

Comment

18. (C) UK DCM Portman's characterization of the Turkish tone as more positive than in the past is noteworthy. S/CT Ambassador Dailey's November 13 Ankara discussions (Ref B) were equally upbeat. The upcoming high-level UK-Turkey CT consultations will indicate whether this is a trend.

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